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## PURPOSE

For children with a permanency planning goal of reunification, caseworkers must make every effort to achieve reunification as soon as possible and within a maximum of 12 months after removal. The purpose of the reunification assessment is to structure critical case management decisions for children in foster care who have a permanency planning goal of reunification; see [FOM 722-07B, Reunification](#). The assessment must:

- Routinely monitor critical case factors that affect goal achievement.
- Help structure the case review process.
- Expedite permanency for children in out-of-home care.

The reunification assessment measures two factors:

- Progress in resolving the primary barriers identified in the needs and strengths assessment.
- Compliance with the parenting time plan during the report period.

The caseworker documents the reunification assessment results in the updated DHS-441, Case Service Plan. The reunification assessment is paired with the permanency planning decision guidelines for subsequent action by the supervising agency; see Permanency Planning Decision Guidelines and Definitions in this item. The guidelines require action to return home, maintain placement or change the permanency planning goal based on parental progress toward barrier reduction, parenting time progress, and child safety.

## COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

The caseworker must complete a reunification assessment prior to every updated DHS-441, Case Service Plan, for all households with a legal right to the child where:

- The permanency planning goal is reunification.
- Parental rights have not been terminated.

**Exception:** The reunification assessment does not need to be completed for a household whose parent is unable to be located or

who is not participating; see [FOM 722-06, Case Planning](#) for definitions of unable to locate and refuses participation.

Caseworkers must complete the reunification assessment in MiSACWIS and link the reunification assessment to the case service plan.

If a decision to recommend return to the home of a parent or a change in permanency planning goal is needed prior to the completion of the Case Service Plan, the caseworker must complete the reunification assessment and safety assessment in MiSACWIS prior to submitting the recommendation to the court of jurisdiction. If the child returns home prior to completion of the initial Case Service Plan, the caseworker must only complete the Safety Assessment; see [FOM 722-09C, Safety Assessment](#).

## REUNIFICATION ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS

The main components of the reunification assessment include:

- Review of any Children's Protective Services (CPS) investigations and dispositions during the report period.
- An assessment of progress towards reduction of the primary barriers to reunification and overall barrier reduction.
- An assessment of compliance with the parenting time plan.
- A determination of the child's safety, when necessary.
- A recommendation, based on the above factors, to:
  - Return home with services this planning period.
  - Maintain own home placement.
  - Remain in placement and maintain current goal.
  - Remain in placement and consider goal change.
  - Remain in placement and change goal.

### Assessment Participants

The caseworker must select the assessment date and household.

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## Investigation History

The caseworker must indicate whether a CPS investigation occurred during the report period covered by the reunification assessment. If there was a CPS investigation during the report period, the caseworker must describe the investigation and findings.

## Barriers and Safety

### *Individual Barriers and Progress Level*

The caseworker must assess the family's progress on the primary barriers as identified on the Family Assessment of Needs and Strengths (FANS) and prior case service plan, if applicable; see [FOM 722-09A, Family Assessment of Needs and Strengths \(FANS\)](#). The caseworker must assess progress using the definitions below.

- Substantial.
  - Parent or caretaker has successfully met all treatment plan objectives for the identified barrier and routinely demonstrates desired behavior including interactions with children and others.
  - Parent or caretaker is actively participating in programs. Parent or caretaker is pursuing the objectives detailed in treatment plan, making significant progress in reducing the identified barrier, and routinely demonstrating desired behavior, including interactions with children and others.
- Partial.
  - Parent or caretaker is participating in, or has completed, treatment plan activities with positive progress, but barrier resolution is not complete. Parent or caretaker occasionally demonstrates desired behavior, including interaction with children and others.
- Poor.
  - Parent or caretaker is unable to participate in treatment plan activities and there is minimal or no progress in reducing barriers. Parent or caretaker rarely or never

demonstrates desired behavior, including interaction with children and others.

- Parent or caretaker is participating in, or has completed, treatment plan activities, but there is minimal or no progress in reducing barriers. Parent or caretaker rarely or never demonstrates desired behavior, including interaction with children and others.
- Refused.
  - Parent or caretaker refuses, either verbally or in writing to the court, to participate in treatment plan activities.
  - Parent or caretaker is unavailable to participate in treatment plan activities.

### ***Overall Barrier Reduction***

MiSACWIS will automatically calculate a suggested overall barrier reduction score based on the progress levels selected by the caseworker for each of the primary barriers.

To determine the score for overall barrier reduction, the caseworker must determine if the caretaker has made progress in addressing barriers that reduce the risk of subsequent harm if the child returns home. This may include barriers that are not primary barriers but that the caseworker scored as needs on the FANS **and would place the child in danger of substantial physical or psychological harm if the child were to return home.**

The caseworker must provide narrative justification that supports the progress levels selected for each primary barrier and overall barrier reduction score.

The caseworker may select a different overall barrier reduction score than the recommended response calculated by MiSACWIS. The caseworker must include narrative justification for changing the recommended response. If the caseworker considered other barriers in addition to the primary barriers listed on the reunification assessment when calculating the overall barrier reduction score, the caseworker must document:

- The additional barriers that were considered.
- The progress level on the additional barriers.
- Justification for the progress levels selected for the additional barriers.

### ***Parenting Time***

The caseworker must score the household's compliance with the parenting time plan. The caseworker must score compliance using the definitions below.

- Substantial:
  - Parent or caretaker maintained parenting time schedule.
  - Parent-child or caretaker-child interaction is appropriate throughout all parenting time.
- Partial:
  - Parent or caretaker generally maintained parenting time schedule.
  - Parent or caretaker notified agency if could not keep appointment.
  - No major problems in parent or caretaker behavior or interactions with the child.
- Poor:
  - Parent or caretaker failed to maintain parenting time schedule.
  - Parent or caretaker failed to notify agency if unable to keep appointment one or more times.
  - There has been poor parent-child or caretaker-child interaction or inappropriate parent or caretaker behavior during parenting time.
  - Parenting time canceled due to parent or caretaker behavior or the court has ordered no parenting time or the child refuses parenting time.
- Refused:
  - Parent or caretaker refused to participate in the parenting time plan.

The caseworker must provide narrative justification that supports the overall parenting time score.

### ***Safety Assessment***

If the caseworker scores **both** overall barrier reduction **and** parenting time compliance as substantial or partial, the caseworker must complete the safety assessment; see [FOM 722-09C, Safety Assessment](#). If the caseworker scores either overall barrier reduction or overall parenting time as poor or refused, the caseworker is not required to complete the safety assessment.

If a safety assessment is required, once completed, MiSACWIS will include the safety decision in the reunification assessment.

### **Reunification Recommendation**

In the final section of the reunification assessment, MiSACWIS will calculate the policy recommendation regarding the child's placement and permanency planning goal based on the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Permanency Planning Decision Tree; see Exhibit I in this item. MiSACWIS calculates the recommendation using the permanency planning guidelines based on information provided in the reunification assessment and, if applicable, the current and prior safety assessments and prior reunification assessments; see *Permanency Planning Decision Guidelines* in this item. Recommendation options are:

- Return home with services this planning period.
- Maintain own home placement.
- Remain in placement, and
  - Maintain current goal.
  - Consider goal change.
  - Change goal.

### **PERMANENCY PLANNING DECISION GUIDELINES**

The caseworker must use permanency planning decision guidelines to determine when to recommend return of a child home, maintain out-of-home placement, or a change the permanency planning goal; see [FOM 722-07, Permanency Planning](#). The caseworker applies the permanency planning decision guidelines following completion of the reunification assessment. The caseworker uses the results of the reunification assessment and safety assessment, if required, to determine recommendations for

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case action. The caseworker must consider outcomes from prior case service plans in combination with current outcomes.

### Substantial

If both parenting time compliance and overall barrier reduction are substantial and the safety assessment decision is:

- Child is **safe**, the caseworker **must** recommend returning the child home.
- Child is **safe with services**, the caseworker **must** recommend returning the child home.
- Child is **unsafe**, the caseworker **must** recommend that the child remain in placement. The number of prior unsafe assessments determine the permanency planning recommendation.
  - After the first unsafe, the caseworker **must** consider changing the permanency planning goal.
  - After the second unsafe, the caseworker **must** consider changing the permanency planning goal.
  - After the third unsafe, the caseworker **must** recommend changing the permanency planning goal.

### Partial

If both the parenting time and overall barrier reduction assessments are partial, or one is substantial and the other is partial, and the safety assessment decision is:

- Child is **safe**, the caseworker **must** recommend returning the child home.
- Child is **safe with services**, the caseworker **must** recommend returning the child home.
- Child is **unsafe**, the caseworker must recommend the child remain in placement. The number of prior unsafe assessments determine the permanency planning recommendation.
  - After the first unsafe, the caseworker **must** consider changing the permanency planning goal.

- After the second unsafe, the caseworker **must** consider changing the permanency planning goal.
- After the third unsafe, the caseworker **must** recommend changing the permanency planning goal.

### Poor or Refused

If the caseworker scores **either** barrier reduction or parenting time compliance as poor or refused, the child remain in out-of-home placement. The number of prior poor, refused, or unsafe assessments determine the permanency planning recommendation.

- After the first poor or refused assessment, the caseworker **must** consider changing the permanency planning goal.
- After two poor or refused assessments, the caseworker must recommend changing the permanency planning goal.
- After one poor or refused and one unsafe safety assessment, the caseworker must consider changing the permanency planning goal.
- After any combination of three unsafe, poor, or refused, the caseworker must recommend changing the permanency planning goal.

### Overrides

There are three circumstances which allow a caseworker to override the recommendation to change the permanency planning goal.

The caseworker may use the following two overrides without prior supervisory approval in the following situations:

- Delayed court disposition. Assessments are unable to be completed because of delayed court dispositions.
- Service to address a barrier is not available. Services to address a barrier are not available in the area or unavailable to the client during the period assessed.

Caseworkers must obtain prior supervisory approval for a discretionary override. A discretionary override may be used when the permanency planning decision guideline recommendation is not

in the best interest of the child due to the family's or child's unique circumstances. The caseworker must provide narrative justification for use of a discretionary override.

If the caseworker completed overrides for multiple children, the caseworker must include separate justifications for each child's override.

SDM Permanency Planning Decision Tree; see Exhibit I.

## **EXHIBIT I**

### **PERMANENCY PLANNING DECISION GUIDELINE TREE**

The following decision tree summarizes the policy guidelines:

**SDM PERMANENCY PLANNING DECISION TREE**

**Circle answers and recommendation.**

**Date**

Initial Placement

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

USP 1

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

USP 2

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

USP 3

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Is this the first USP?

**Yes**

**No**

Is parenting time or overall barrier reduction poor or refused?  
Or is the safety decision unsafe?

Is parenting time or overall barrier reduction poor or refused?  
Or is the safety decision unsafe?

**Yes**

**No**

**Yes**

**No**

Child remains in placement, consider permanency plan goal change.

Recommend return home with services this planning period.

Is parenting time and overall barrier reduction at least partial AND is the safety decision at least safe with services?

Check one for recommendation.

**First poor/refused or unsafe:** remain in placement & **consider** goal change.

**Second poor/refused:** remain in placement & **change** goal.

**Second unsafe or first poor/refused and first unsafe:** remain in placement & **consider** goal change.

**Any combination of three unsafe or poor/refused:** remain in placement & **change** goal.

**Yes**

Recommend return home with services this planning period.

**POLICY CONTACT**

Questions about this policy item may be directed to the [Child Welfare Policy Mailbox](#).